

CALIFORNIA

OCCUPATIONAL GUIDES

OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY ASSISTANTS/ OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY AIDES

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INTEREST AREA
MEDICAL OR HEALTH



WHAT DO OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY ASSISTANTS AND OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY AIDES DO?

OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY ASSISTANTS (OTA) and AIDES work under the direction of occupational therapists (OT). They provide rehabilitative services to restore and maintain function in persons with mental, physical, emotional, or developmental disabilities. These services help the clients compensate for limitations that would otherwise affect their employment, daily living, or leisure activities.

Occupational Therapy Assistants and Aides support occupational therapists by providing assistance during client examinations, treatment administration, and monitoring. They maintain client health records and related information and also perform a wide range of

practice-related duties. The OTAs must complete an associate's degree or the equivalent from a college or technical school to qualify for employment. The Aides must have a high school diploma or the equivalent to be employed.

Occupational Therapy Assistants

Occupational Therapy Assistants help clients with rehabilitative activities as outlined in a treatment plan. The work includes activities such as teaching an ailing elderly person the proper method of moving from a bed into a wheelchair or teaching a client with arthritis how to more effectively perform daily living activities. OTAs monitor a client's treatment activities to make sure they are performed correctly and provide encouragement to clients. They also record their client's progress and document for billing purposes. An OTA, under the direction of an OT, performs the following tasks:

- Assists occupational therapists in the implementation of the treatment plan to improve a client's task performance.
- Assists in the evaluation of a disabled client's daily living skills and capacities.
- Instructs the client and family in home programs, basic living skills, and care and use of adaptive equipment.
- Discusses the progress of the client with the supervising occupational therapist.
- Designs and adapts equipment and working and living environment.
- Maintains information in client records and prepares written reports.
- Assists professionals to administer diagnostic tests of clients' abilities.
- Constructs splints and other assistive devices under supervision of an occupational therapist.

Occupational Therapy Aides

Aides perform maintenance activities and prepare work areas, materials, and equipment used during treatment. They are responsible for completing a variety of clerical tasks and transporting clients. Aides may also oversee client-related tasks of a very routine nature when appropriately supervised. An Aide performs the following tasks:

- Prepares the work area and material, and assembles and maintains the equipment.
- Answers the telephone, schedules appointments, restocks and orders supplies, and fills out insurance forms and other paperwork.
- Transports clients to and from occupational therapy work area.
- Assists clients with routine activities directly supervised by a licensed or qualified professional.
- Reports information and observations to the supervisor daily.

WHAT SKILLS ARE IMPORTANT?

Occupational Therapy Assistants use the following skills, knowledge, and abilities:

- Problem Sensitivity – The ability to tell when something is wrong or is likely to go wrong. It does not involve solving the problem, only recognizing there is a problem.
- Memorization – The ability to remember information such as words, numbers, pictures, and procedures.
- Instructing – Teaching others how to do something.
- Social Perceptiveness – Being aware of others' reactions and understanding why they react the way they do.
- Service Orientation – Actively looking for ways to help people.
- Active Listening – Listening to what other people are saying and asking questions as appropriate.
- Speaking – Talking to others to effectively convey information.

- Reading Comprehension – Understanding written sentences and paragraphs in work-related documents.
- Writing – Communicating effectively with others in writing as indicated by the needs of the audience.
- Technology Design – Generating or adapting equipment and technology to serve user needs.
- Therapy and Counseling – Knowledge of information and techniques needed to rehabilitate physical and mental ailments and to provide career guidance including alternative treatments, rehabilitation equipment and its proper use, and methods to evaluate treatment effects.
- Education and Training – Knowledge of instructional methods and training techniques including curriculum design principles, learning theory, group and individual teaching techniques, design of individual development plans, and test design principles.

Occupational Therapy Aides use the following skills, knowledge, and abilities:

- Memorization – The ability to remember information such as words, numbers, pictures, and procedures.
- Social Perceptiveness – Being aware of others' reactions and understanding why they react the way they do.
- Service Orientation – Actively looking for ways to help people.
- Active Listening – Listening to what other people are saying and asking questions as appropriate.
- Speaking – Talking to others to effectively convey information.
- Reading Comprehension – Understanding written sentences and paragraphs in work-related documents.
- Writing – Communicating effectively with others in writing as indicated by the needs of the audience.

WHAT'S THE WORK ENVIRONMENT?

Occupational Therapy Assistants and Aides work in general hospitals, skilled nursing facilities, rehabilitation centers, mental health facilities, therapy clinics, private residences, school systems, and private practices. They usually work during the day, but may work nights or weekends depending on the schedule of the therapist. Those working in a hospital or clinic usually work in a room that is sanitary, well lighted, and air-conditioned. Those in private practice may go to the client's home where the physical conditions may vary. OTAs and Aides should be in good physical condition since their duties include regular contact with ill or injured people, lifting and moving clients frequently, and standing for long periods of time.

Union Membership

Union membership is infrequent and usually only applies to a few government and academic employers.

WHAT'S THE CALIFORNIA JOB OUTLOOK?

The following information is from the occupational projections produced by the Employment Development Department's Labor Market Information Division for both Occupational Therapy Assistants and Aides:

Estimated number of workers in 1998:	1,700
Estimated number of workers in 2008:	2,500
Projected Growth 1998-2008:	47.1%
Est. openings due to separations by 2008:	500

These figures do not include self-employment.

The employment of OTAs and Aides is expected to increase much faster than the average for all occupations through 2008.

Trends

This growth comes, in part, from an aging population, especially the large baby-boom generation (1946-1964). Growth is also expected due to advances in medical science, which allows more people to survive critical illnesses and injuries who will then need rehabilitative therapy.

Finally, as more of the hands-on work is delegated to the OTAs and Aides to cut costs, more jobs will be available in both job categories.

WHAT DOES THE JOB PAY?

California Earnings

Wages vary according to education, experience, ability, work complexity, type of employer and geographical location.

Occupational Therapy Aides 2001 Wages

Hourly wages range from	\$9.11	to	\$14.64
Average hourly wage	\$13.63		
Average annual wage	\$28,343		

Occupational Therapy Assistants 2001 Wages

Hourly wages range from	\$16.09	to	\$21.97
Average hourly wage	\$18.89		
Average annual wage	\$39,298		

Source: Occupational Employment Survey of Employers by EDD/LMID.

Hours

Many positions in this industry are full-time, although there are a significant number of part-time and temporary, or on-call jobs, depending on the specific work location. Full-time positions are the normal 40-hour week; and part-time, temporary, or on-call jobs average about 20 hours per week.

Benefits

Nearly all employers provide insurance (medical, dental, vision, and life), leave (sick and vacation), and retirement plans to their full-time employees, with some offering stock options and 401K plans. Only a few employers provide these benefits to part-time employees.

HOW DO I PREPARE FOR THE JOB?

Education and Training

Individuals who want to become Occupational Therapy Assistants must complete a two-year

associate's degree or certificate program from an accredited community college, technical, or vocational school. High school preparation should include biology, health, and physiology courses. Performance of volunteer or paid work in the health care field is very helpful. The first year of study typically includes courses such as introduction to health care, basic medical terminology, anatomy, and physiology. During the second year the study becomes more complex, usually including classes in subjects such as gerontology, mental health, and pediatrics. Students must also complete supervised fieldwork in a clinic or community setting before passing the national certification examination to become Certified Occupational Therapy Assistants (COTA).

Aides must have a high school diploma, or the equivalent, and may increase job prospects by volunteering their services to an employer in the field of occupational therapy or a related health care field. They usually receive most of their training on the job. Through education and training as described above, Aides can become OTAs.

Licensing and Certification

Once OTAs pass a national certification examination administered by the National Board for Certification in Occupational Therapy (NBCOT), they become COTAs. Certified Occupational Therapy Assistants must have this national certification to practice in California. Beginning in January 2003, the newly created California Board of Occupational Therapy will be certifying OTAs. Certification requirements will include: criminal record (fingerprint) check, minimum age of 19 years, no alcohol or controlled substance addictions, no discipline by a professional certifying body or a state licensing agency within five years, and satisfaction of NBCOT entry-level certification requirements.

Continuing Education

Continuing education is not currently required, however, OTAs must maintain their professional competence.

HOW DO I FIND THE JOB?

Direct application to employers remains one of the most effective job search methods. Most successful job applicants come from current employee referrals, newspaper advertisements, and unsolicited job searches. Private firms are listed in the yellow pages under: Health Services, Home Health Services, Hospitals, Nursing Homes, Occupational Therapists, Physical Therapists, Physicians, Rehabilitation Services, and Schools (Academic, Business, and Vocational). California job openings can be found at various online job-listing systems including CalJOBSSM at www.caljobs.ca.gov or at America's Job Bank at www.ajb.dni.us.

For other occupational and wage information and a listing of the largest employers in any county, visit the Employment Development Department Labor Market Information Web page at www.calmis.ca.gov. Find further job search assistance from your nearest Job Service office www.edd.ca.gov/jsloc.htm or the closest One-Stop site listed on the California WorkNet site, www.sjtcc.cahwnet.gov/sjtccweb/one-stop.

WHERE CAN THIS JOB LEAD?

Many employers will promote employees in these positions who gain the proper training, education and certification to occupational or physical therapist positions. Other related health care fields in which similar work can be found and where advancement is possible for Occupational Therapy Assistants and Aides are dental, medical, optometry, podiatry, recreation, and pharmacy.

OTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Information on a career as an Occupational Therapy Assistant and a list of schools offering accredited programs can be obtained from:

American Occupational Therapy Association, Inc.
4720 Montgomery Lane
P.O. Box 31220
Bethesda, MD 20824-1220
(301) 652-6611
www.aota.org

Occupational Therapy Association of California
1401 El Camino Avenue, Suite 230
Sacramento, CA 95815
(916) 567-7000
www.healthcaresource.com/otac

National Board for Certification in Occupational
Therapy, Inc.
800 S. Frederick Avenue, Suite 200
Gaithersburg, MD 20877-4150
(301) 990-7979
www.nbcot.org

Employment Projections by Occupation
www.calmis.ca.gov/htmlfile/subject/occproj.htm

Employment and Wages by Occupation
[www.calmis.ca.gov/file/occup\\$/OES\\$.htm](http://www.calmis.ca.gov/file/occup$/OES$.htm)

RELATED OCCUPATIONAL GUIDES

Dental Assistants	No. 27
Occupational Therapists	No. 143
Nursing Aides and Orderlies	No. 442
Physical Therapy Aides and Assistants	No. 451
Optometric Technicians/Optometric Assistants	No. 470
Medical Assistants	No. 513

OCCUPATIONAL CODE REFERENCES

SOC (*Standard Occupational Classification*)

Occupational Therapist Assistants	31-2011
Occupational Therapist Aides	31-2012

O*NET (*Occupational Information Network*)

Occupational Therapist Assistants	31-2011.00
Occupational Therapist Aides	31-2012.00

OES (*Occupational Employment Statistics*)

Occupational Therapy Assistants and Aides	66021
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DOT (*Dictionary of Occupational Titles*)

Occupational Therapy Assistant	076.364-010
Occupational Therapy Aide	355.377-010